



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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For Immediate Release

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## **Rep. James and Sen. Bernier Announce Proposed Expansion of Mental Health Beds in Chippewa Valley**

(Eau Claire)... “I am thrilled to announce that earlier this week the Legislature took a tremendous step toward fixing a key aspect of the mental health crisis facing our part of the state,” began Sen. Kathy Bernier (R-Lake Hallie).

For years, Sen. Bernier has heard from local officials and law enforcement about the challenges of transporting individuals experiencing a mental health crisis from northern and western Wisconsin to the eastern side of the state. As a former chief of police, Rep. Jesse James (R-Altoona) faced those same challenges firsthand. Now, working together in the Legislature, they have successfully led an effort with the State Legislature’s budget writing committee to provide \$15 million for HSHS Sacred Heart and HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospitals to greatly expand the mental health beds available in this part of the state.

With the state funding, the HSHS Western Wisconsin Division, which includes Sacred Heart Hospital and St. Joseph’s Hospital, will be adding 22 new mental health beds for both adolescents and adults. These beds will be an enhancement to their existing units, creating a 33-bed adult unit at HSHS Sacred Heart Hospital in Eau Claire and a dedicated 18 bed adolescent unit at HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospital in Chippewa Falls. With these additional beds, the hospitals will be well positioned to better serve the residents of the 29 counties in northern, western and central Wisconsin.

Currently individuals facing a mental health crisis and in need of emergency detention face a multi-hour drive, often in the back of a squad car, to the state’s only mental health facility near Oshkosh. By improving access to adult and adolescent behavioral health beds in the Chippewa Valley, this project will reduce the strain this long commute places both on patients as well as law enforcement while also enhancing patient recovery by keeping them in closer proximity to their support network of friends and family.

“By reducing time spent transporting individuals and establishing a location closer to home, county and local governments in our part of the state are in line to save more than \$2.7 million dollars every year,” said Rep. James.

Andrew Bagnall, president and CEO of the HSHS Western Wisconsin Division stated, “HSHS has been committed to serving the behavioral health needs of the Chippewa Valley for nearly 60 years. This project directly aligns with our mission and allows us to enhance our inpatient services to meet a significant community need while also improving care delivery for our patients.”

Sen. Bernier concluded, “I would like to thank the leadership team at HSHS Sacred Heart and HSHS St. Joseph’s who identified the community’s need for additional mental health beds and were able to quickly work with us to formulate a plan benefiting northwestern Wisconsin. This plan is good for our community and great for people in need of treatment.”

This expansion of mental health care proposal is included in the legislature’s current version of the two-year state budget. After the bill is reviewed by both houses and passed, it will be sent to Governor Evers to be signed into law. Supporters of the emergency mental health care proposal are encouraged to contact their state elected officials and the Governor and urge them to support this important project.

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